COVID-19 VACCINATION ROLLOUT IN WEST AFRICA

When the Covid-19 pandemic first unfolded, countries in West Africa did relatively well compared to other regions in the world. However, as the highly infectious Delta variant started spreading in West Africa at the beginning of June 2021, infections increased and reached an all-time high between mid-July and the beginning of August. By then, the number of deaths due to Covid-19 had more than doubled compared to the second wave peak in February 2021. Within this period, fatalities increased by 80% in Senegal, 134% in Sierra Leone and even 188% in Liberia. Infectious cases in the region surged by almost 40%.

In total, slightly more than 650,000 cases and over 9,000 deaths were recorded in the beginning of September although reports from hospitals and cemeteries suggest the numbers might be significantly higher. According to The Economist’s calculations of excess fatalities, death rates in sub-Saharan Africa are in fact 14 times higher than indicated by official numbers.

COVID-19 in West Africa: Number of new cases confirmed daily

Note: Updated on 11 October 2021
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One reason for the third wave surge is the increased contamination the new Delta variant causes among younger patients. While the growing infection rates could be counteracted through reinforced vaccination campaigns, large parts of West Africa’s population remain unprotected as a result of the international community’s failure to share vaccines equitably. So far, most West African countries have vaccinated only around 1% of their population fully, which is even less than the continental average of around 4%. In contrast, the European Union only recently declared 70% of its adult population to be fully vaccinated, while the percentage of vaccinated people in many other countries lies around 60%. Although infection rates in West Africa and the world have slowly declined, it is clear that this trend can only be sustained by a reinforced support to vaccination campaigns in countries that have so far been left behind.

Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19

Note: Based on latest data available from 23 August-27 September 2021